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MMOZine

Issue 34 | November 2011

Free Magazine For MMO Gamers. Read it, Print it, Send it to your mates

REVIEWED!

CITY OF HEROES FREEDOM

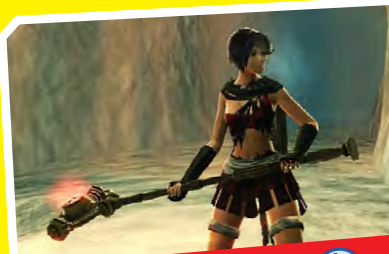
THE MASSIVE HIT MMO BECOMES A FREE-FOR-ALL!

STAR TREK: INFINITE SPACE PREVIEW + STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

+ FIRST LOOK

Aion 3.0

Time to mount up!



+ REVIEWED

Vindictus

A load of old pants?

+ PREVIEWED

WoW: Mists of Pandaria

WoW's new expansion promises something different

Welcome to MMOZine

The free-to-play market got another massive boost this month with the move over for City of Heroes. A long-established and well-loved game, it's a bold move for the developers, but also one that we can see working very much in their favour. The question is though, is this the future? Will all games end up being free-to-play with micro payments in-game? Who knows, but we suggest that you watch this space.

Aside from our City of Heroes review though, we've also got a WoW double-hitter off the back of BlizzCon in the shape of Hour of Twilight and Mists of Pandaria. But that's not all, as we've also managed to squeeze in a review of Vindictus, a preview of Star Trek: Infinite Space and more. Enjoy.

Dean Mortlock, Editor
mmozine@gamerzines.com

MEET THE TEAM

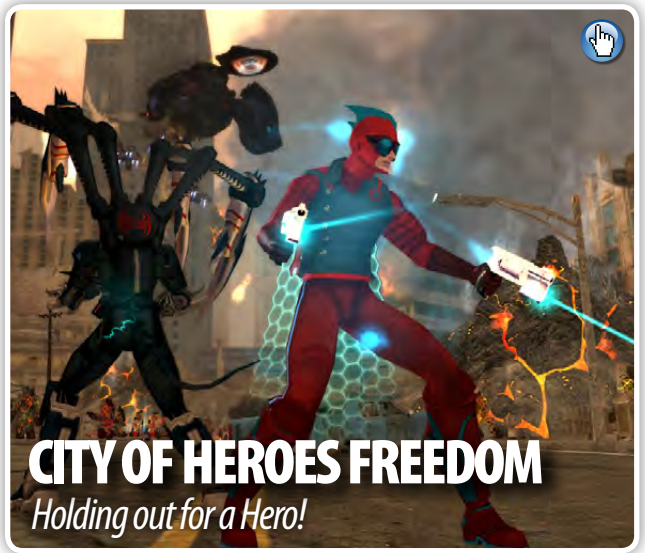
The MMOZine massive were told to go forth and multiplay, which they did…

MARK PILKINGTON
Mark's boldly going, where no gamer's gone before!

ANDY GRIFFITHS
Say hello to Andy. Our PC gaming expert also edits our sister mag, *PCGZine*.

DON'T MISS!

This month's highlights…



CITY OF HEROES FREEDOM

Holding out for a Hero!

World of Warcraft: Mists of Pandaria

Whatever you do, don't mention Kung Fu Panda…

Star Trek: Infinite Space

Vindictus

QUICK FINDER

Every game's just a click away

Aion 3.0
Transformers Universe
Priston Tale
The Secret World
Hedone
Mythos
World of Warcraft: Hour of Twilight
World of Warcraft: Mists of Pandaria
Star Trek: Infinite Space
Star Wars: The Old Republic
City of Heroes Freedom
Vindictus

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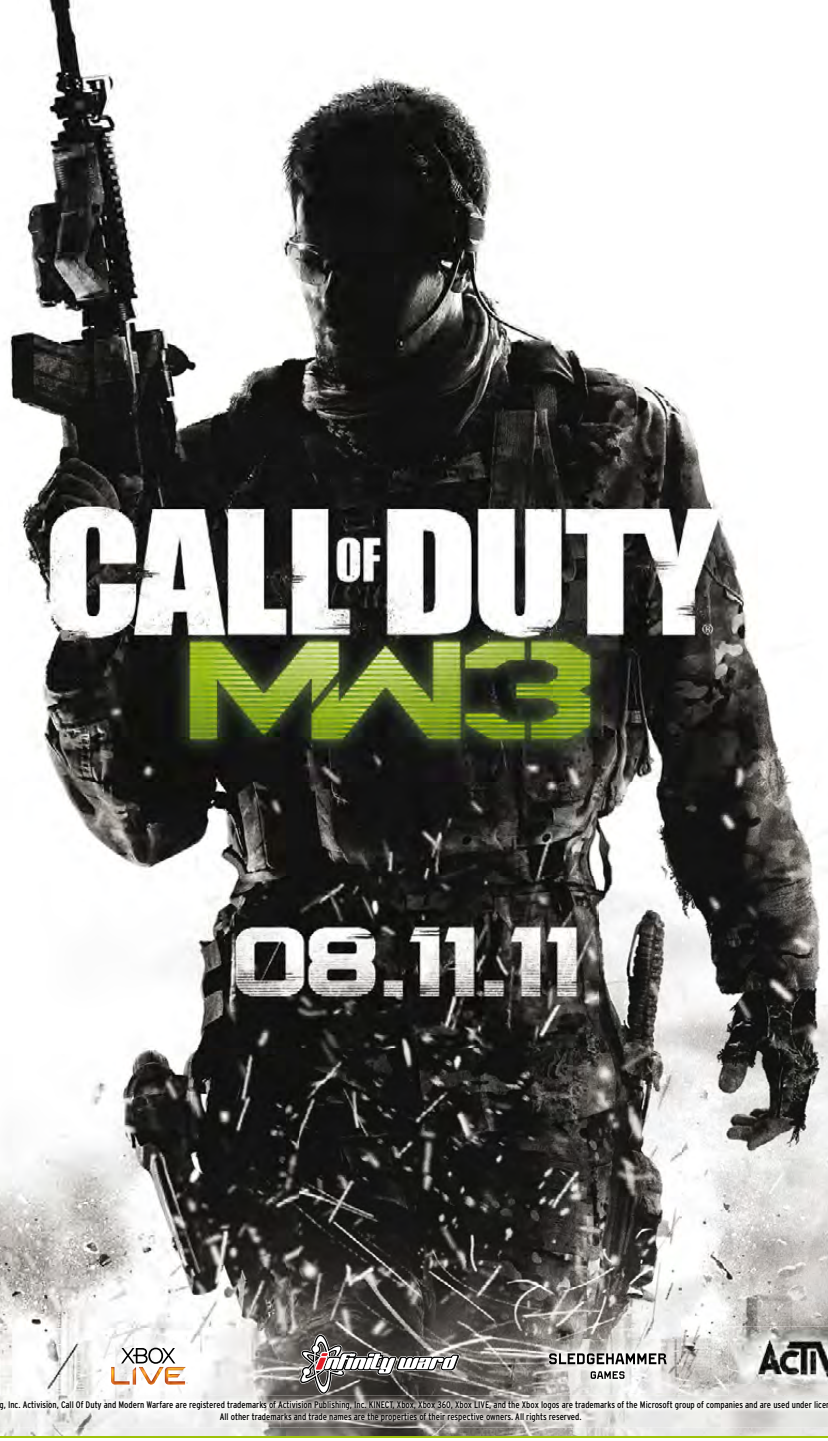

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XBOX 360

Jump in.

7 UP

New MMOs and content updates to mark on your calendar with a BIG RED PEN!

Aion

Developer: NCsoft | **ETA:** Out Now

Over the past month Aion's 2.7 update has gone live, adding a wealth of tweaks and features. Most notable of which is the new PvP Crucible Coliseum and the ability for Daevas to take each other on in the Arena of Discipline. Check out our hands-on in this very issue!

Priston Tale

Developer: SUBA Games | **ETA:** Out Now

This long-running MMORPG has received another update this month, adding the Ice Mine region. This desolate area is meant to offer a big challenge to some of this game's most experienced players, and seeing as some have been playing since 2004, they've earned a challenge.

Transformers Universe

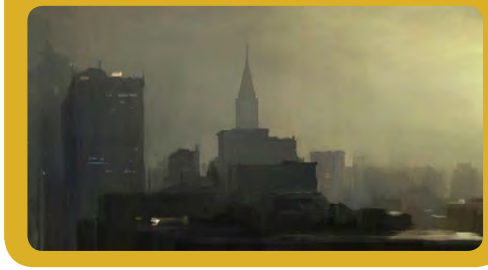
Developer: Jagex | **ETA:** 2012

Ever so slowly, Jagex are peeling back the curtains on their grand free-to-play MMO based on Transformers. New York's Comic-Con saw the game shown for the first time and it seems the British devs are going for a modern motif with hidden folding metal and the ability for players to choose an allegiance. Autobots – let's ride!

World of Darkness

Developer: CCP | **ETA:** TBA

In accordance with CCP 're-focusing' on EVE Online, World of Darkness' development staff has been significantly cut. Nevertheless the apocalyptic MMO with a vampire theme is still expected to release sometime next year, just don't expect it to be the sort of game-changer CCP are known for.



Mythos

Developer: Frogster | **ETA:** N/A

As you've been reading this another MMO is heading to that illustrious server in the sky. Mythos had a complicated journey to market with two different studios and six years in development, and unfortunately its dungeon-heavy style of gameplay wasn't entertaining enough to sustain itself for more than six months. Thanks for the good times though, Mythos.

The Secret World

Developer: Funcom | **ETA:** April 2012

Recently we had the chance to see the first 30 minutes of The Secret World in action, post-character creation, and we were bowled over by how different this MMO seems from its peers. The opening mission sees the player fighting off the forces of the Occult in a Tokyo subway. From there we were shown the traditional MMO gameplay with mob control and skill manipulation prerequisites to success. We already know that Funcom can craft a great yarn, as proven by DreamFall, but this demo showed that they also have the beginnings of a great MMO too.

Hedone

Developer: UTV | **ETA:** N/A

Did you know Hedone is the greek translation for pleasure? No, we didn't either. This month the Beta for this MMO FPS went live in both Europe and USA, so everyone can sample some futuristic Deathmatch fun!

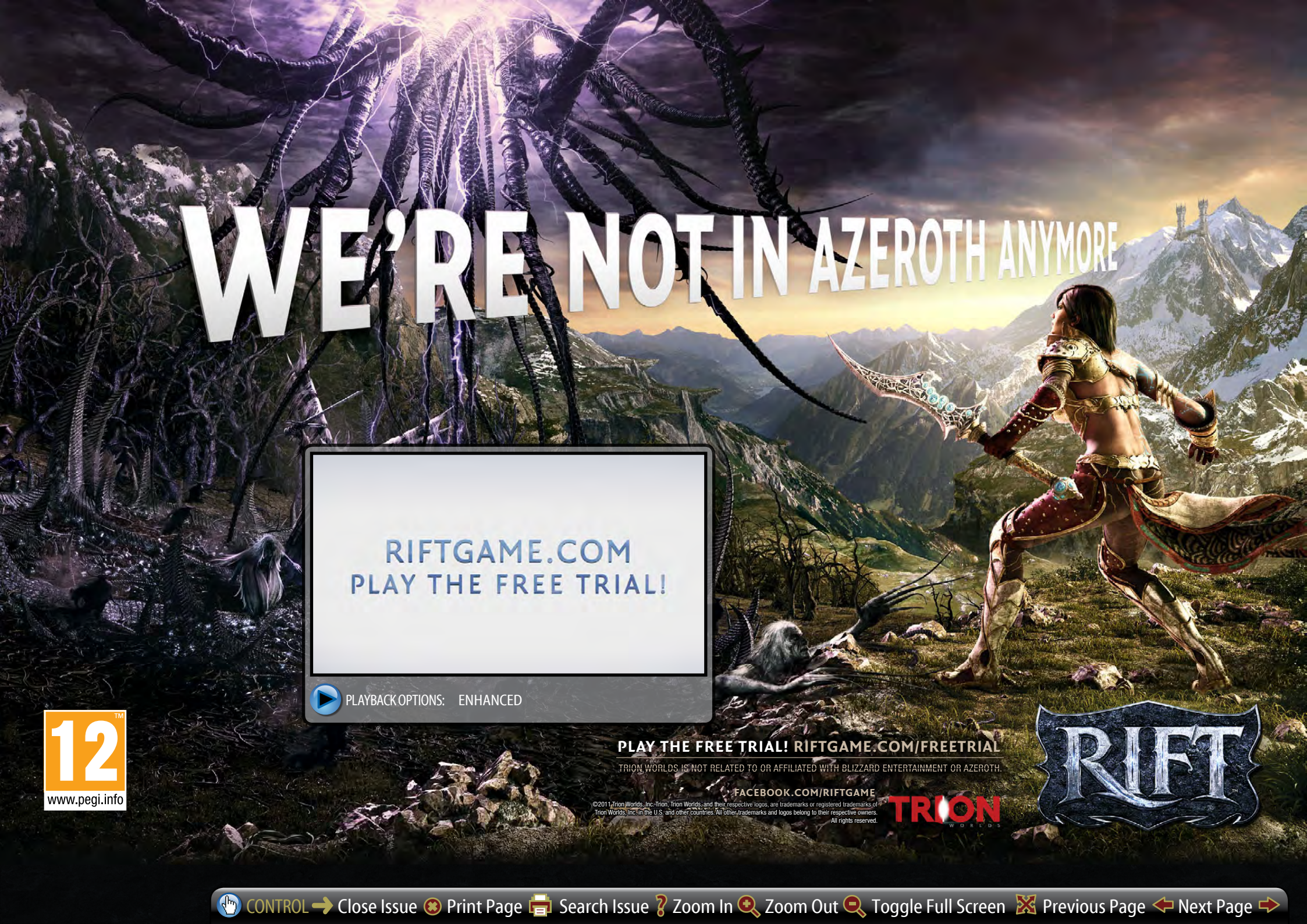
ON THE RADAR

SPRING
- Wizardry Online

WINTER
- Jagged Alliance Online

DECEMBER
- Star Wars: The Old Republic

NOVEMBER
- Dragon Rites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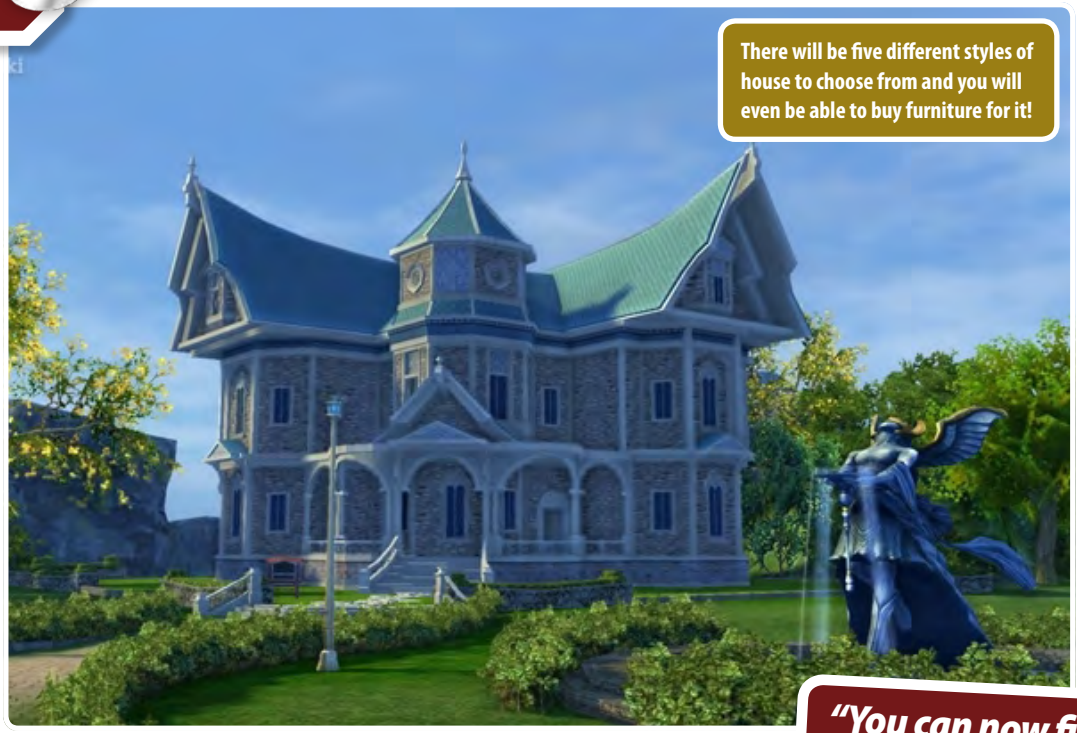
TRION WORLDS
RIFT

Publisher: NCsoft
Developer: NCsoft
Heritage: Guild Wars, City of Heroes
Link: http://uk.aiononline.com
ETA: TBC

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Aion 3.0



There will be five different styles of house to choose from and you will even be able to buy furniture for it!

Aion 3.0

FIRST LOOK

Is '3' the magic number for Aion?

What's the story?

We're getting used to Aion's annual expansions now, and the good news for fans of the game is that 3.0 promises to be the best one yet, as it's packed with some stunning new features – some expected and some which will be considered to be more of a surprise.

What do we know?

Quite a lot, as it happens. For starters, the level cap now stands at 60 – and there are plenty of new skills and quests for the new levels – and there are two new lands to play through. Titled Sarpan and Tiamaranta, they are open to both races, but the interesting thing about both of them is that certain areas will be marked as neutral. This means that you can fight monsters side-by-side with your opposing race, and there's an absence of PvPing – although duelling is permitted.

Going deeper into 3.0's new features, we find mounts added to the game for the first time. We've heard that these will range from dragons to clouds and bikes, so you can expect some original and stunning creations online soon. FInally, there's the introduction of houses, which will be available to players of level 21 and above.

"You can now fight monsters side-by-side with your opposing race"

When do we get more?

The expansion is live on the Korean PTS as we speak, so it should not be long before we get to play it for ourselves. In the meantime, why not check out our digital Aion Magazine (www.aionmagazine.com), where you'll find out much more about Aion 3.0, along with the chance to get some exclusive free items, too.

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PC DIGITAL DOWNLOAD

World of Warcraft: Hour of Twilight

Publisher: Blizzard Entertainment
Developer: Blizzard Entertainment
Heritage: Warcraft series, Diablo series
Link: www.wow-europe.com
ETA: Late 2011

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of World of Warcraft: Hour of Twilight

> "After a year of flying across Azeroth, it's time for the champions to stand up, be counted and end the tyranny of the Aspect of Death"

Because it's all about the end game…

So the time has come. You and your guildies have zerged every normal boss and farmed every heroic. You laugh at the Firelands and can't wait for a bigger challenge. Well, folks, it's coming. Yes, it's time for the Hour of Twilight.

Last time we walked you through the changes happening in-game, and just as we went to press, Blizzard lifted its embargo on the dungeons and raids, which is what we're going to tell you all about this month, including the much-anticipated Deathwing raid. Yes, after a year of flying across Azeroth torching people, cities and critters, it's time for the champions of Azeroth to

Before facing Deathwing, we must traverse time itself.

END TIME

This jaunt into a possible future gives you a glimpse into what might happen if Deathwing wins – basically he will destroy all life on Azeroth. The 'dungeon' takes place in the Dragonblight, across the four Dragonshrines and sees you face off against the leader of the Infinite Dragonflight, Murozond. The plot concludes the Infinite Dragonflight storyline which has been running since the Caverns of Time were added and it's revealed that this Dragon is a darker incarnation of the Timeless One, the Aspect Nozdormu.

World of Warcraft cont.

stand up, be counted and end the tyranny of the Aspect of Death.

Before you kick his arse there's prep work to do first. To take down the Aspect of Death you need an artefact which isn't just legendary – you need the Dragon Soul. This was an enchanted disc Deathwing crafted while still Neltharion. He tricked his brother and sister Aspects into donating their power and then decimated their flights and, after the world was Sundered, the Dragon Soul disappeared. Now it's time for you to reclaim it.

Just as ICC had three lore-rich dungeons that fed into the Lich King raid, setting up the storyline around the antagonist's inevitable demise, so this raid sends you on a quest through time itself before you can kick Deathwing's arse. Yes the Caverns of Time is getting some new wings! This sees you visit an alternate future where Deathwing's impaled corpse decorates Wrymrest Temple, so obviously he's no longer of use to the Old Gods. How he meets his demise remains a mystery but the wastelands are home to the

"To take down the Aspect of Death you need an artefact which isn't just legendary – you need the Dragon Soul"

WELL OF ETERNITY

In Night Elf history, no figure is as infamous as Azshara, the beautiful leader who elevated the Highborne and beckoned Sargaeas into Azeroth. Taking place in the city of Zin-Azshari, this dungeon will see players meeting younger incarnations of Illidan and Malfurion Stormrage as well as Tyrande and the infamous demon Mannoroth. We will be able to see the most pivotal event in the War of the Ancients, when the original Well of Eternity is destroyed.

Armies of demons stand between you and the Well of Eternity.

World of Warcraft cont.

shades of Sylvanas, Jaina, Baine and Tyrande, which you must defeat in order to complete the scenario. Then you must return to the past to reclaim the Dragon Soul and help defeat Azshara, beautiful Queen of the Night Elves. The final dungeon encounter sees you escort Thrall, the World Shaman, to Wrymrest where he will use the Dragon Soul to face Deathwing.

The Dragon Soul raid involves a frenzied battle, killing numerous bosses, both draconic and otherwise before chasing the fleeing Aspect of Death in an airship, parachuting onto his back and ripping off his armour as Deathwing flies towards the Maelstrom. By the time he crash-lands, all that is left is the evil, corrupt core of the once-noble Aspect which is why, for this good reason, that the final boss encounter is called the Madness of Deathwing. For this you're aided by the remaining Aspects in their Dragon forms as you leap from outcrop to tiny island around the massive, glowing whirlpool which links Azeroth with Deepholm. Deathwing's doom is assured, the obstacles which stand in the way are some of the greatest and most insurmountable. That said, the rewards will be epic (and include special dragon mounts) and the glory unmatched when the patch hits live servers.

> *"The Dragon Soul raid involves a frenzied battle, killing numerous bosses"*

Once Archbishop, Benedictus is now the Twilight Father and it's time to face him!

MMOZine Verdict

A brand new start to the world's most popular MMO. Welcome to Azeroth 2.0

HOW COMPLETE

95%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

80%

AION

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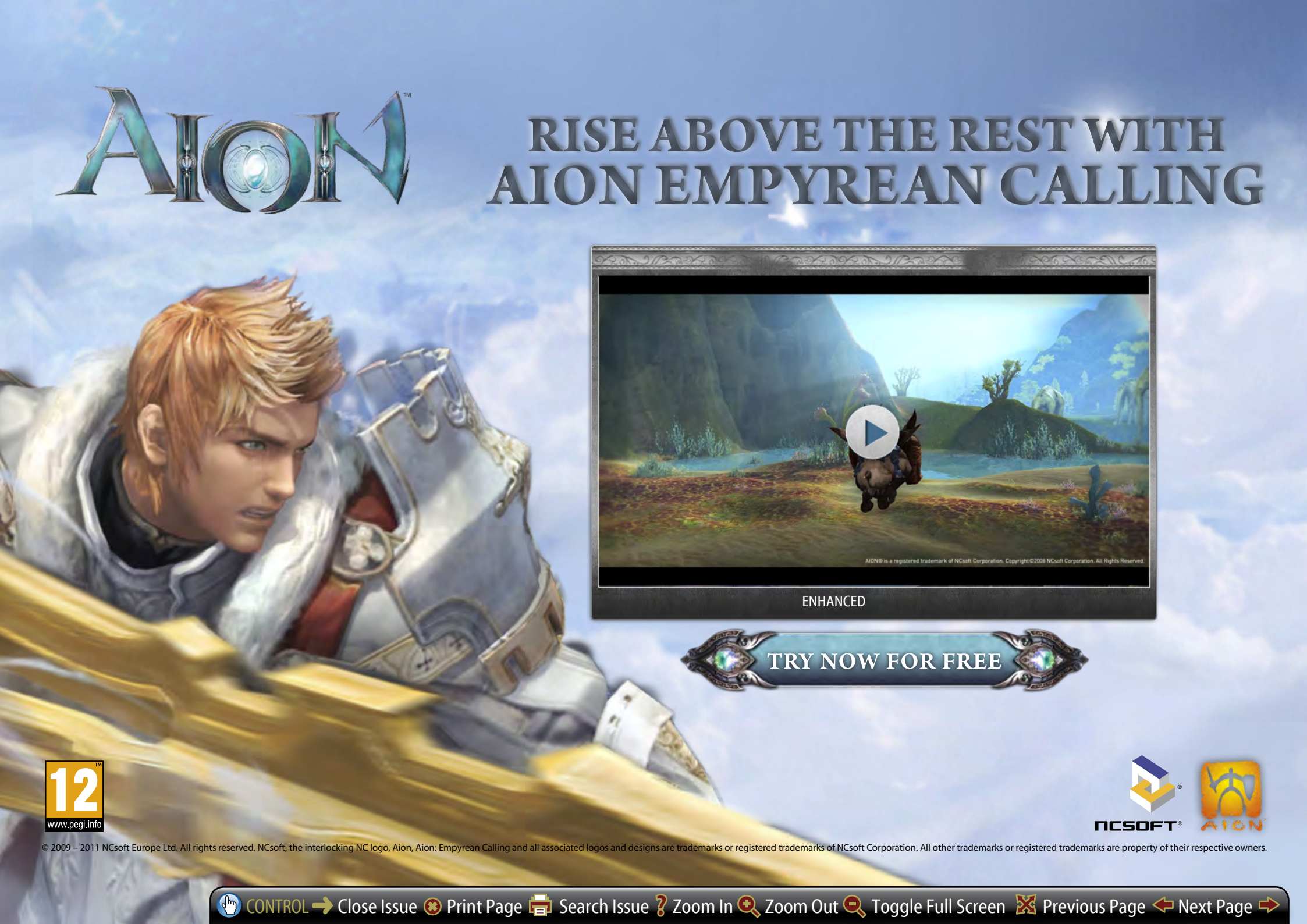

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Publisher: Blizzard Entertainment
Developer: Blizzard Entertainment
Heritage: Warcraft series, Diablo series
Link: http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/game/mists-of-pandaria
ETA: TBC

World of Warcraft: Mists of Pandaria

Say 'Nihao' to the Pandaren!

BlizzCon has come and gone, revealing Blizzard's fourth expansion for the ever-popular World of Warcraft. The effects of Deathwing's Cataclysm are continuing to be felt across Azeroth and has finally revealed the lush isle of Pandaria, home to the wise, alcohol-loving Pandaren. Here's what we know about the upcoming expansion.

Mists of Pandaria continued

#1 THE PANDAREN

Pandaren players begin their journey to greatness in a starting zone called the Wandering Isle which exists on the back of a turtle called Shen-zin Su.

#2 THE MONK

The new class is the Monk which uses Chi energy and martial arts to deal devastating blows to their opponents. They are skilled with fists and weapons, wear cloth and leather armour but are also capable healers and as Brewmasters – tanks in all but name – they can take more punishment than you'd expect.

Mists of Pandaria continued

#3 PANDARIA

Pandaria is a single island and comprises of five zones: The Jade Forest, The Valley of Four Winds, Kun-Lai Summit, The Townlong Steppes and The Vale of Eternal Blossoms. Horde start on one side and the Alliance on the other, just like Northrend.

Roll over screen for annotations

#4 NEUTRAL FACTION

The Pandaren themselves are pretty neutral, favouring neither side over the other. As a result, from level 10, they can choose to be members of both the Horde and the Alliance.

Mists of Pandaria continued

#5 NEW LEGENDS!

We finally get to meet the legendary Chen Stormstout, an independent Brewmaster last seen in Warcraft III, and help him reclaim his family brewery.

#6 NEW RAIDS

The first announced raid will see you venturing into the Mogu'Shan Palace in the heart of the Vale of Eternal Blossoms where there will be six bosses to take down. Along the way you'll meet and learn more about the mysterious native Mogu.

BLIZZARD DOTA

This year WoW fans will also be able to see their favourites from Azeroth slip into a new StarCraft II map called Blizzard DOTA. The set up is simple: two gods have kidnapped characters from all three franchises, including Sylvanas, Stitches and the Lich King, Arthas, to fight each other. It's coming soon so keep your eye out for it!

#7 PET COMBAT

Everyone collects pets, and Blizzard has finally announced we'll be able to make use of them. In Mists, they will be including a new pet system which will allow you to level your companions and give them names in a similar way to hunters. You'll also be able to make them battle each other using a turn-based system.

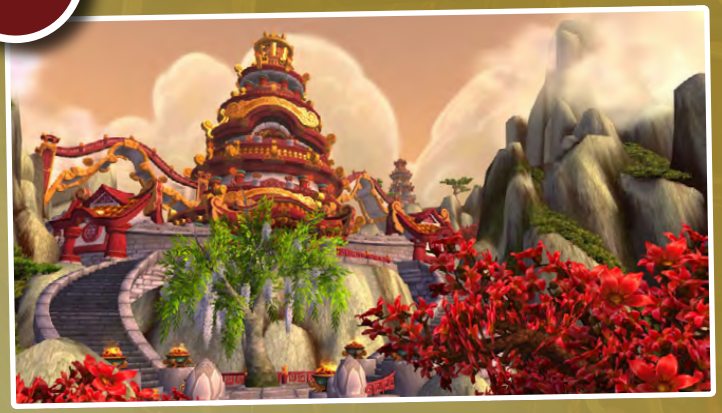
#8 HEROIC CLASSIC DUNGEONS

Blizzard are revamping some of the old classic dungeons we loved and never visit any more. This will include Scarlet Monastery (now condensed into just two dungeons with three and five bosses) and Scholomance.

#9 PVP

Blizzard will be implementing new battlegrounds in the form of Azshara Crater, Stranglethorn Diamond Mines and the Valley of Power. There will also be a new PvP arena in Uldum called the Tol'Vir Proving Grounds, which will function in a similar way to the arena found in Nagrand during TBC.

#10 LOADS OF OTHER STUFF...



Of course, this isn't everything. Blizzard has a lots of other cool stuff planned, including account-wide Achievements, a new level cap of 90, PvE Scenarios and new dungeons to farm.

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Star Trek: Infinite Space

Publisher: Gameforge
Developer: Keen Games
Heritage: Bite Fight, Gladiatus
Link: http://startrek-is.com
ETA: Late 2011

To boldly go for ever, and ever…

While Star Trek: Deep Space Nine has long been consigned to the pages of television history, German developer Keen Games is busy putting the final touches to a free-to-play browser-based game based upon that very series. Published by fellow German company Gameforge – who themselves have a plethora of online games to their credit – the game puts you in the captain's seat on the side of either the Federation or Klingons.

For the real Trekkies among you, you will be interested to hear that the action takes place specifically during the Dominion

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Star Trek: Infinite Space

Your shields are a vital strategic resource – without them you would be a sitting target.

Roll over screen for annotations

A direct hit! Now watch the fireworks as your opponent scatters all over the cosmos.

THE DOMINION WAR

Based upon the Deep Space Nine storyline of the same name, the Dominion War pitted the forces of the Dominion, Cardassians and the Breen up against the United Federation of Planets, the Klingons and Romulans. The story featured throughout pretty much the entire run of Deep Space Nine, covering an incredible six seasons of the show.

Star Trek continued

War from the third season of the television series, while the rest of us can content ourselves with the knowledge that it pitched two vast military sides against each other, involving not only the Federation and Klingons, but also many other different races, including Romulans, Cardassions and the Breen.

Once you have chosen who to play as and created an avatar, you will find the game is split into two distinctive sections – a 3D one and a 2D one. The 3D section is set within the space stations, and allows you to wander around freely and socialise with other players. It's here that you can recruit allies to join forces with you and aid you in battles. Which brings us nicely onto…

"Once you have chosen who to play as you will find that the game is split into two sections – a 3D one and a 2D one"

The 2D sections – where the real action takes place – is where you issue commands to your ship in the heat of battle. Keeping a careful eye on your damage meter, you will have to judge which weapons to use in which situation, managing your crew, resources and positioning. Quite often you will find yourself

Star Trek continued

juggling them all at once, so a clear and tactical head is called for.

Being a browser-based game, you will not need an expensive hardware set up on your computer, although you will need to install a copy of the Unity 3D Engine plug-in (which is also used to power Battlestar Galactica Online) in order to play.

Of course, Star Trek: Infinite Space isn't the only MMO available based upon the Star Trek universe. Star Trek Online was launched last year. Unfortunately, with plenty of gusto and hype came a very poorly received game. Visually it was hard to fault, but underneath the detailed graphics was a less-than-pleasing game which many labelled as boring. And, to be fair, that was one of the nicest things that was said.

"The hope is that Star Trek: Infinite Space will learn from its older sibling's mistakes"

The hope for many fans of the series is that Star Trek: Infinite Space will learn from its older sibling's mistakes and present us with not only a game that ticks all the right boxes for an authentic Star Trek feel, but will also be fun to play. With the games development almost at an end and a Beta version forthcoming, you can be sure that we will be among the first to try the game out first-hand and report our finding to you as soon as we can. Until then, as the saying goes, 'live long and prosper'…

Two Birds of Prey with only one thing on their minds – your precious space station.

MMOZine Verdict

A browser-based game that looks set to eclipse Star Trek Online as the Trekkie's MMO of choice

HOW COMPLETE

80%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

85%

CONTROL Close Issue Print Page Search Issue Zoom In Zoom Out Toggle Full Screen Previous Page Next Page

Publisher: EA/LucasArts
Developer: BioWare
Heritage: Mass Effect series, Knights of the Old Republic, Neverwinter Nights
Link: www.swtor.com
ETA: December

PREVIEW FEEDBACK! Click here to tell us what you think of Star Wars: The Old Republic

WHY STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC IS THE MMO YOU'RE LOOKING FOR

Over the past month we've been granted unprecedented access to the second MMO set in the Star Wars universe and the good news is the multi-million dollar project is in a very healthy state. But aside from the grandeur of lightsabers, blasters and The Force why exactly should we be excited that beloved storytellers BioWare are finally dipping their collective feet into MMO waters? Well, oh cynical ones, the answer isn't as complicated as you may think, and to help you along with your decision process when the game's launched in December we've listed The Old Republic's greatest strengths and a few of its weaknesses so you know exactly what you're getting into before servers go live!

STAR WARS OLD REPUBLIC

PUTTING STORY FIRST

Storytelling has always been at the centre of everything BioWare has done and The Old Republic continues that proud tradition. MMOs are rarely praised for telling a good story, but from the moment you create your character you're greeted with moral decisions – be it a particularly cocky dialogue response or judging whether an individual is acting in good faith. An early quest we witnessed while playing as a Republic Trooper had us either chastising or helping an individual who had stolen medical supplies from a local military base. Her intentions seemed noble, but in fact she was revealed to be an Imperial agent.

Each character class shares the starter planet with another, along with some shared questing content, but certainly early on at least, the different moral choices come think and fast. Players will be making important decisions regarding their character's fate and how they fit in the ongoing intergalactic struggle.

FULLY VOICED CAST

The only major hurdle to overcome in preparation for The Old Republic is the substantial client size, which clocks in at around 23Gb once sat on your hard drive. BioWare are still busy optimising the build, however all of that data is put to good use as you'll find every NPC has their own fully voiced dialogue. The calibre of VO is consistently excellent too, and provides the sort of immersion MMOs rarely provide. We really missed this feature when we ventured back to our old online stomping grounds.

"Every NPC has their own has their own fully voiced dialogue"

EVERYONE GETS A SHIP

Now this may seem minor if you aren't a fan of Star Wars – if that's the case then why are you here? – but in The Old Republic every player regardless of class, allegiance or faction unlocks their own ship from level 13 onwards, opening up the entire galaxy for exploration. Well we say entire galaxy, but what we really mean is a dozen or so planets at launch, but they do include several systems fans of this franchise will recognise, including Coruscant, Nar Shaddaa, Dantooine and the forgotten world of Alderaan!

Each class gets their own unique ship design, and once you've left your starter world these function as the hub for your operations. There will be customisation opportunities as well as special space combat missions. Great stuff!

MORE THAN A COMPANION

As you continue your own class-specific campaign you'll meet various characters, some of which may or may not become part of your permanent crew. During our spell as a Bounty Hunter working on Hutta, we met a spunky competing agent who soon recognised our combative prowess as a way to get work in the galaxy. These encounters are a great means to introduce not only other races, but also inter-species prejudices and politics which dominate the wider story arc. There will also be room for multiple romance options during the campaign, and certain companions will be able to carry out work on your behalf while offline e.g completing hit contracts or item farming.

IMMEDIATELY ACCESSIBLE

Ever since The Old Republic was first shown publicly, it would be fair to say many commentators called it out on is WoW-like combat, and during the early levels this is certainly the case. However, that isn't the damning statement it intends to be as like Blizzard's popular title, BioWare's bends over backwards to help the player from levels 1-10. Everything from inventory management to maximising DPS potential is explained early on with the aid of UI pop-ups. Thankfully you can turn these off from the start, but it's good that newbies are offered an easy way in.

> "It's genuinely exciting to have a new array of classes which actually mean something"

CLASSES THAT MATTER

This may seem like a minor matter in the grand scheme, but it's genuinely exciting to have a new array of classes which actually mean something rather than the traditional fantasy offerings. After all, who else but an MMO veteran knows the difference between a Mage and an Elementalist? In The Old Republic, each of the six different character classes are easy to understand from the start and have vastly different paths and power sets to compliment them. Crucially BioWare have managed to make classes which don't wield a lightsaber appealing, with the Smuggler proving the most enjoyable sampled thus far. The style is entirely fitting of the Han Solo persona, with a fighting style which accommodates pistols, nimble feet and utilisation of cover to kill any enemies in the way. It's also worth noting that each class skill tree has two vastly different specialisation options.

PICK UP AND PLAY PVP

For the vast majority of MMO players, we think Player vs Player isn't really for them; that distinct competitive breed who aren't happy enough with questing, earning XP and playing their part in a grand story arc. Instead they want to crush the skulls of their fellow man on a battlefield which revolves around teamwork as much as it does skill. Well, The Old Republic has you covered there, too. Instanced Warzones allow Republic and Empire forces to face off against each another on arenas which usually have turrets or some kind of tug of war dynamic in play.

If that politically charged arena doesn't take your fancy, there's also Huttball – which reminds us of UT 2003's Bombing Run – where two teams compete to get the ball into the other squad's endzone.

COPIOUS AMOUNTS OF POLISH

The Old Republic isn't a sandbox MMO. Everything here has, in one way or another, been experienced by another player at some point. Some activities more so than others, and the unfortunate downside of being so story-driven is that at times you won't feel as though you're striving through the galaxy forging your own story. Instead you'll be waiting for your friend to finish with an instanced story area so you can have your turn or there will be a moment where you've just slain a particularly tricky boss and a few minutes later he pops back up again. However due to that rehearsed nature everything we experienced in the opening levels is very polished and refined to such a degree that we're unsure why this game isn't on shelves already.

To conclude, The Old Republic is shaping up to be the sort of MMO experience every Star Wars lore nut will absolutely adore, and even though it might be too fenced in for some tastes, we've had a blast with it and can't wait to play more.

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Publisher: NCsoft
Developer: Paragon Studios
Heritage: N/A
Link: http://na.cityofheroes.com/en
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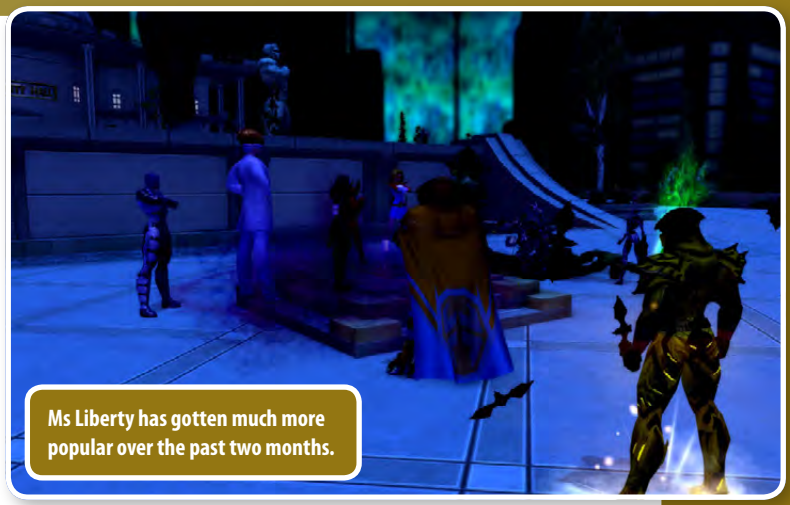
City of Heroes Freedom

There's nothing villainous about this free-to-play transformation


Ms Liberty has gotten much more popular over the past two months.

NCsoft's beloved superhero MMORPG has always had a special place in our collective hearts. First launched way back in 2004 – a time when Blizzard's dominance with WoW was unimaginable – no comic-book game has ever captured the spirit of being a costumed crime fighter as accurately as City of Heroes, even today. Seven years is undoubtedly a long time, and as we're sure the vast majority of you reading this have at one time or another jumped, ran, flown or teleported around Atlas Park and its supporting locales, we'll skip over what it's like to actually play the game and instead talk about how the free-to-play changes have transformed servers.

Like most transitions from subscription to free-to-play, City of Heroes' revolves around a cash shop dubbed the 'Paragon Store'. As a result the player base has been split into three different segments: free, premium and VIP. Free players get to make one character on each server, have access to eight different class archetypes with a wide variety of costume

At first it's hard to understand what's going on during battles thanks to the array of effects awash on the screen, but you soon grow to love them.

The new neutral starter area is a nice addition and allows players to either choose to play as a hero or a villain.

Auras can be unlocked from level 30 onwards. Alternatively you could just buy a set.

City of Heroes cont.

pieces to choose from, and can take part in all of the standard questing content including a variety of tasks, trials and raids. As expected from such a well-established MMO, there's plenty of questing content to get through here, and even though objectives rarely deviate from the 'go here, kill everyone' formula, the cleverly written dialogue and elaborately designed team-mates you meet make the XP and influence harvesting worthwhile.

Free players are capped at level 50, but we found that at around level 15 we were already beginning to feel envious of other players' costume pieces and exotic power-sets purchased from the store. That said, Paragon Studios haven't implemented the store to fracture the userbase, as every type of account mingles freely on all but one server, but it's just that soon you'll begin seeing powers you wouldn't mind experimenting with, and slowly but surely that cash investment doesn't really seem that unreasonable. When that inevitably happens – more out of vanity sake than playability – you'll be upgraded to a premium account, or what we like to call the sweet spot. The major benefits are in terms of functionality, with premium players able to join supergroups, message fellow players directly and usually get XP bonuses and limited-use powers thrown their way. It's a really nifty system which makes CoH much more charitable than other free-to-play efforts, while at the same time a lot of the perks are still unlockable in-game. A prime example of this is capes which can usually be purchased straight out of the character creator screen for a total of 80 points (around 70p) if you wish, but you can wait until level 20 if you don't want to splash out.

> **"Paragon Studios haven't implemented the store to fracture the userbase"**

EXPRESS YOURSELF

City of Heroes' character creator is widely acknowledged as being the best in all MMO land, simply due to the breadth of skills and costume variety available to the player. Take 'Captain Conservative' for instance. Born in times of economic strife, this natural defender uses the gravity powerset to ground the dreams of those who oppose him, and wears a nifty suit topped off with a twirly moustache to remind everyone not only who's boss but also who has the most capital to burn.

STAYING RELEVANT

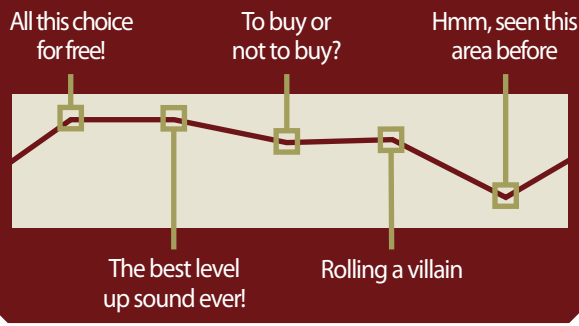
Three reasons why City of Heroes has managed to withstand the test of time

CHARACTER CREATOR | **VISUAL OVERHAUL** | **NEW CONTENT**

Even to this day, City of Heroes' character creator is unmatched! The wealth of options available are simply mind boggling, yet the UI allows easy navigation and doesn't mislead players on what's free and what needs to be paid for. It isn't unusual to spend an hour fiddling with your character's appearance before you hit servers and you'll love every second of it.

Enemy design isn't as varied as we remember but your team's wacky array of personas often make up for that.

PULSOMETER: Signs of life



City of Heroes cont.

Additionally, City of Villains is also chucked in at no extra cost, so those who want to have a more dastardly character can do so with new zones, questlines and more varied environments than the standard campaign. Honestly we were shocked when we discovered this standalone experience was thrown in without any fanfare, but it shows the intent which is driving this MMORPG's rebirth – this isn't a smash-and-grab initiative, it's all about welcoming new players and old with open arms. The signature story arcs and the latest expansion (Going Rogue) still have to be paid for, the latter of which costs 1,200 points (around £10.20), but in all honesty, Freedom still represents a great deal.

There's seven years worth of great content here and the vast majority of it is free to enjoy, and enjoy it you will. City of Heroes has that fun factor certain online experiences have lost, with a traversal system that doesn't fence you in and generous skill progression which means players are constantly rewarded for their efforts. Take flight for instance, the holy grail of superhero-based games. Most MMOs would lock that baby up good and tight until the later levels, whereas in CoH you can ascend to the heavens after only a few levels.

While we've been enjoying the likes of Rift and Aion, this MMO has been ticking away adding better visuals, tweaking starter areas and creating more content, in addition to allowing players to create their own via the Mission Architect. Some factors will be hard for some modern MMO-ers to overcome, such as bland locales and an over-reliance on instancing, but these are more of an issue with this game's age rather than its design.

Freedom is exactly the shot in the arm CoH needs to get the numbers up and we implore players to roll a character once more.

IS VIP FOR ME?

Aside from the free and premium options there's also the choice to go VIP and pay a monthly subscription. For your regular wallet pain you'll gain access to all of the 14 archetypes and over 150 powersets, in addition to gaining 400 Paragon Points per month, as well as the signature story arcs. Oh, and before we forget, the Going Rogue expansion too. Honestly, there's more than enough to keep regular players going without committing to a monthly fee, but it's nice to have the option.

MMOZine Verdict

The most generous free-to-play MMO to date

- ✓ The best traversal powers in any MMO
- ✓ Hundreds of hours worth of free content
- ✗ Environments still bland

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Vindictus

Publisher: Nexon
Developer: devCAT
Heritage: Mabinogi
Link: http://vindictus.nexoneu.com
OUT NOW

Getting Vinddicted to Vindictus

Don't let Vindictus' predecessor Mabinogi dissuade you. This is a violent and action-packed physics-based MMO that's sure to shock and surprise the cutesy tween-dominated Mabinogi audience. Set several hundred years prior, Vindictus is about war and strife and does its best to distance itself from its cutesy past.

Rather than hack 'n' slash your way across vast landscapes, Vindictus instead focuses on short mini-missions intertwined into a story told in a quaint and homely village. The habitants all have a story to share and the objectives feel more key to the story than most traditional MMOs do.

The main town has everything you need, from the well-organised marketplace, shops and mission points, as well as two cute puppies that follow your every movement. The village also gets a makeover depending on the season and, at the time of writing this, Halloween festivities have left the village covered in pumpkins and flags.

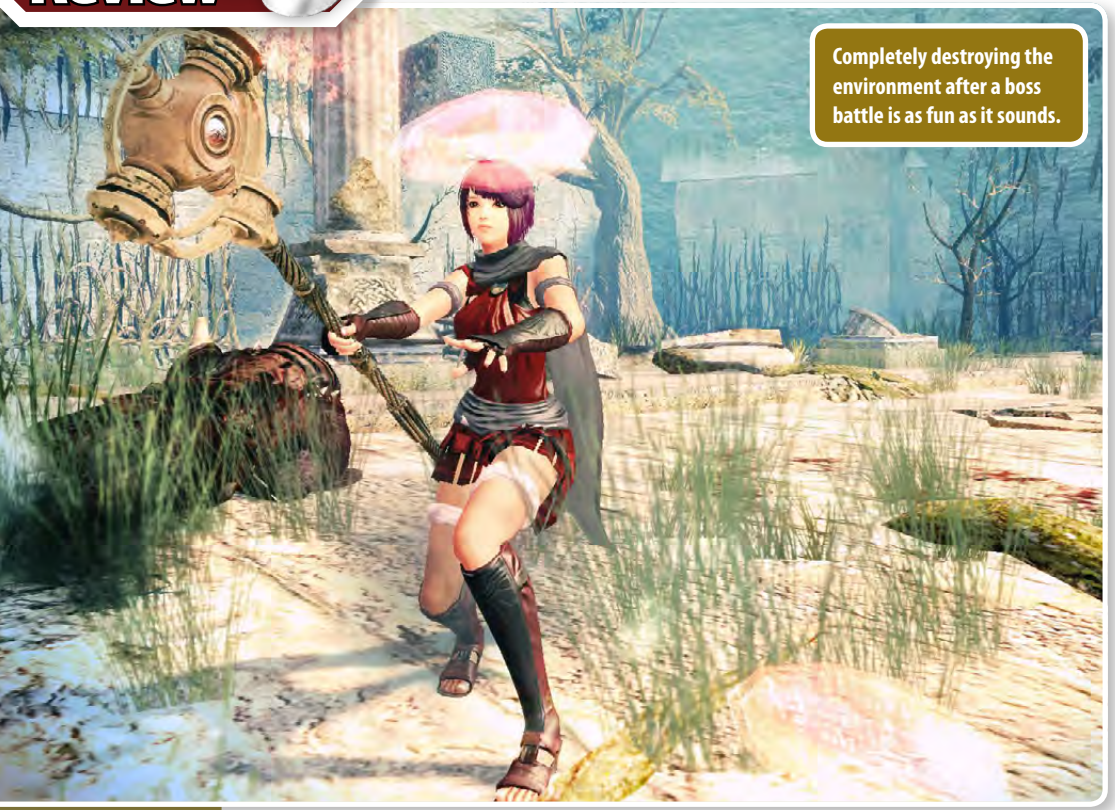
The main bulk of your time is spent in battle quests. They're missions that can last from three minutes to an hour depending on your team and objectives within the mission. Each of these missions is instanced, and normal matches contain up to four players while raids can have six-eight members. The missions are hosted by the party leader via a peer-to-peer connection, which means match quality can vary.

Currently you can select a normal or hard version of a mission with hero mode to be unlocked once the level 44 level cap is increased. Hard missions rank up the difficulty but also increase the drop rate for any rare items you're itching to get. Within the mission selection is a mission oath, which can range from not using HP potions to completing the battle in less than 15 minutes. Each oath awards you with battle points, and you'll need to collect these to gain access to missions later on in the game.

Evie can pick up objects and transform them into healing crystals.

EVENT MISSIONS

The initial launch of the European version of Vindictus saw the arrival of many Halloween events. One of these events allowed large parties to partake in Pumpkin throwing for some cool items. We preferred pumpkin throwing in our underwear though. LOL indeed...



Completely destroying the environment after a boss battle is as fun as it sounds.

Vindictus continued

Having objectives is a great way of getting people to repeat missions but can also cause a number of headaches. While missions have the main oath objectives, there are also secondary objectives to complete during the mission and these are trickier to pull off.

Secondary objectives require teamwork, and if you're playing with friends it's a great challenge but sadly, as with the nature of the Internet, it attracts people who don't always want to play ball. You could all agree to make sure that the last hit on a boss needs to be a kick but there will always be that one person who finds it funny to ruin the objective for everyone. It's not too often it happens but when you're trying to complete some of the harder objectives, it can become very frustrating. Annoying players aside, the sheer nature of party play forces you to work as a team and it's a great way to make new friends and play partners.

You currently have three characters to choose from: Fiona, a melee female with sword and shield. Lann, a male attacker who can wield two swords at once, and Evie, who can switch between a Mage with strong magical spells or a Scythe-wielding Assassin, depending on your equipment. You mix up your attacks by performing a number of timed attacks on your mouse or keyboard. Switching between attack, jump and bash can result in spectacular attacks and timed right can leave your opponent paralysed.

Alongside missions and battle points are also titles. Gaining titles is the quickest way to increase your stats and you'll also need to complete them to unlock certain skill levels. Once gained, they permanently add to your character's overall stat value so you

"The slow pace of this game may still appeal to certain players"

RELAXING AT THE CAMPFIRE

Campfires are an easy way to gain some bonus stat increases during battles. You can sit at the campfire for a bonus before heading into a battle or make a campfire inside a mission. Campfires can heal your HP, repair your armour and add AGI or DEF bonuses. Make sure you find two objects make out of wood to light the fire.

ONE WE MADE EARLIER...

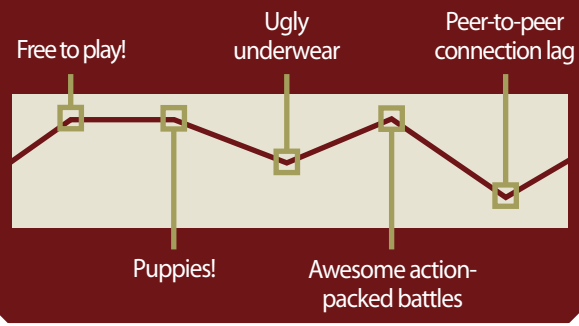
Rather than creating a character from scratch, Vindictus has three pre-made characters that you customise slightly before playing.

FIONA | LANN | EVIE

Fiona mixes sword, hammers and shields to play a more defensive melee character. Her attacks are a little slower but a good safe option.

Armour breaks mid-combat so make sure you have some sexy undies ready to show off. No, really.

PULSOMETER: Signs of life



Vindictus continued

don't need to worry about constantly having 'Puppy Lover' on top of your character name for the specific stat boost it offers.

With being a free-to-play MMO, you've got to expect some kind of premium goods to trickle their way in somehow and Nexon do it in a most infuriating way. The wonderful outfits on display are instantly ruined by the default underwear, a white T-shirt and matching ugly shorts which creep their way into view into the majority of the outfits. Some of the early Evie one are the worst effected, and it really ruins the excitement of getting new gear.

You can pick up 6,250 Nexon points for a fiver, which will easily net you a premium haircut and colour, new underwear, and maybe some leftover points for make-up, bigger breasts or tattoos. The trick is that these items are temporary and after 30-days will disappear from your inventory. Purchasing the permanent alterations to your character can be a lot more costly and with new avatar content being added to the store often, it can dissuade you from taking the permanent – but cheaper in the long run – option.

Jiggling breasts and premium underwear aside, Vindictus is a deep and enjoyable MMO experience for the gamer who needs a more involving action game to sink their teeth into. While it's pretty easy to rise through the ranks, it's Vindictus' short but fast-paced instances that create enough excitement to get addicted to, but one that doesn't demand the grind most other MMOs ask of you.

Simply put, Vindictus may be more accessible but it's certainly an enjoyable MMO experience.

FREEZE FRAME

Taking you through the game, one step at a time…

5 MINUTES
Waking up after the opening tutorial. Time to customise our character…

10 MINUTES
Exploring the town, and you'll collect some quests as well.

1 HOUR
Entering battles and picking up objects to hit enemies with.

1 WEEK
Taking part in fishing quests. As you'd expect, it's not very exciting!

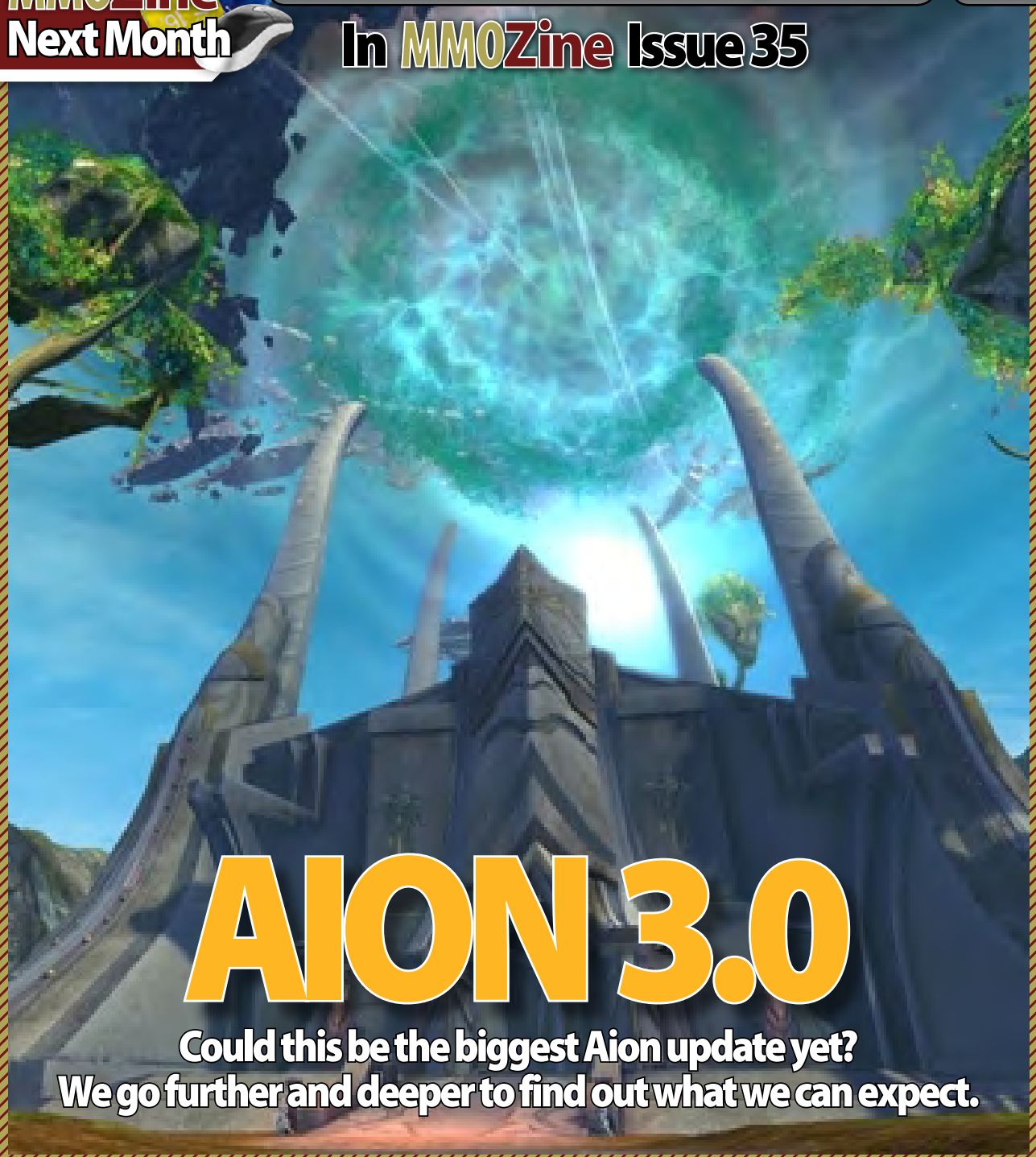
2 WEEKS
We've got the hang of the combat and now we're triple SSSing missions!

MMOZine Verdict

A fresh entry to the MMO universe that will keep you hooked!

- ✓ Environments break with physics based action
- ✓ Free, fun and fast
- ✗ Ugly underwear puts you off beautiful outfits

In MMOZine Issue 35



AION 3.0

Could this be the biggest Aion update yet? We go further and deeper to find out what we can expect.

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Out 15th December!

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